



NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals
Published by the NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

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SERVING THE YOUNGEST WITH DISABILITIES: COLLABORATION IS KEY FOR STATES

The youngest children in the United States have benefited from intensive interest and investment in recent years by governors and legislators, as well as federal initiatives. As a result, for example, kindergarten is almost universal, with 85% of the 3.7 million five-year-olds who attend kindergarten enrolled in publicly supported programs. Often in conjunction with federal programs, three- and four-year olds, especially those in low-income families, also have opportunities to attend pre-schools as well as Head Start programs. For example, the Southern Regional Education Board reports that all 13 states in its collaboration now have state-sponsored pre-kindergarten programs or a pilot program.

The full scope of federal/state/local collaboration reaches a certain group of children even earlier, those identified by screening programs as having some type of disability or, according to the term most often used, as having developmental delays. In 1986, Congress added pre-school grants for children ages 3-5 to the federal laws covering students with disabilities (all states participate) and another program covering infants and toddlers. The National Education Goals Panel selected enrollment of children with disabilities in preschool programs as an indicator of fulfilling Goal 1—all children in America entering school ready to learn

State efforts, coupled with the federal Early Intervention Program and the Preschool Grants Program, have opened up needed services, support, and education for children with disabilities in the past decade. The number of children ages 3-5 served by programs for children with disabilities increased from 360,000 in 1988 to 571,000 in 1997

The federal emphasis on very young children with disabilities has been modified because of lessons learned from early implementation of the law. For example, technical assistance gradually focused on better data gathering and on personnel development. Also, the formula changed from one based on a



child count to one based on general population and poverty. With steady efforts, 49 states (out of 51) significantly increased the number of children with disabilities enrolled in preschools between 1991 and 1998.

As the state profiles that follow show, services for young children with disabilities follow them wherever they are. Infants and toddlers tend to be reached at home settings most frequently (47%), followed by early intervention classrooms and outpatient service facilities. As the children grow older, classroom settings become more prevalent. Because the children move into classroom settings from a variety of early learning experiences, transition efforts are especially important.

Research shows that collaboration among parents, schools, and service providers is essential to ensuring smooth transitions for young children with disabilities as they move from one program to another. The policy framework for quality transitions includes:

- Inter-agency linkages that establish lines of responsibility and coordinate all components of services such as child find, referral and assessment individualized family service plans, and evaluations.
- Preparation, information exchange, and training between programs that are ending for children with disabilities and programs that are receiving them, such as from day care to a preschool.
- Family support that gives families information they can access easily.
- Program emphasis that prepares children for the skills they will need to succeed at the next environment.
- Staff training and collaboration.

In addition to strong parent involvement, the most effective programs for young children with disabilities: occur early in a child's life; operate from a more structured and systematic instructional base; prescriptively address each child's assessed needs; and include normally developing children as models. (From *Effective Practices for Preparing Young Children with Disabilities for School*, ERIC Digest). The thrust of federal and state policy now is to expand on the last point—fully inclusive preschool programs. Research supports this move. Several studies, for example, found that children with disabilities who were enrolled in integrated early childhood programs developed higher levels of social, cognitive, and linguistic skills than children in segregated settings

To encourage inclusion, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Systems have provided help to states through consultation and meetings on a regional basis to foster planning and sharing of ideas. Whether through this technical assistance or pre-existing state initiatives, collaboration within and among states is a hallmark of states' efforts to include children with disabilities under Goal 1. States with the highest numbers of children with disabilities enrolled in preschools per 1,000 of their 3-5-year-olds include Kentucky, Maine, West Virginia, and Arkansas.

MAINE

Maine has been developing a seamless system for young children for almost two decades. A primary strategy is to use regional sites under the Child Development Services System to ensure the coordination and delivery of services to meet the developmental needs of infants and young children. These 16 sites, according to Jaci Holmes, early childhood consultant for the State Department of



The National Education Goals Panel

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Education, "have created a blended birth to age five system." In addition, the staffs at the regional sites, she says, stay connected with the many child initiatives in place in the state.

As part of the coordination theme, a Children's Cabinet, first appointed by Gov. Angus King in 1995, brings five state-level departments together to oversee and coordinate the delivery of services to Maine's children. The Cabinet covers 17 initiatives—from child care to youth violence prevention.

How this coordination at the state level ripples down to local services is well illustrated by the efforts to help children with disabilities. Much of the work began at a regional meeting sponsored by the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Systems in 1996. This launched Maine's State Planning Team charged with increasing the state's capacity to serve children in quality, inclusive settings. The Team has been so successful that the federal Child Care Bureau designated Maine as a MAP (Mapping a Plan) to Inclusive Child Care State.

The regional meeting included state directors of special education, state Section 619 coordinators (the federal program for children ages 3-5 with disabilities), state child care personnel, Head Start state coordinators, and parents. Their discussions focused on the inclusion of children with special needs in early care and education settings, and the follow-up became the State Planning Team. In order to make the linkages at the state level, the State Planning Team has now become a subcommittee of the state's Child Care Advisory Council.

Two other initiatives are helping Maine to include more and more children with disabilities (up to 82% in 1998) in preschool programs. One is the Developmental Therapy Leadership Group, funded by grants to the Department of Education and the Center for Community Inclusion at the University of Maine/Orono. In collaboration with the State and Regional Child Development Services Network, the Group is building capacity for inclusion of children with disabilities in various programs, primarily by training personnel and parents. Also, funding through the Start Me Right legislation is supporting local proposals to provide home visits to all new births in Maine, with follow-up visits to families requesting further support. The home visitors provide referrals to the appropriate regional network if they are concerned that a child has developmental delays.

Another major collaboration is among state-level professional associations. In 1997 the Maine Head Start Directors Association, Maine Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and the Maine Child Care Directors Association held a landmark two-day retreat to form a partnership. The Alliance for



Children's Care, Education and Supporting Services (ACCESS) was later joined by the Maine School Age Care Alliance and Maine Family Child Care Association. With grants from the Head Start Collaboration, ACCESS is providing training and opportunities for collaboration to further its vision of assuring that "every family will be able to access quality, early care and education in the setting of their choice." Also, says the vision statement, "every family in need of comprehensive early care and education services will receive them. Early care and education providers will become an inclusive community that welcomes, values and supports all caregivers and parents."

The federally funded Head Start Collaboration not only helps ACCESS but also provided mini-grants to initiate regional collaboratives that assess local needs and plan for the use of local, state and federal resources to meet those needs. Finally, state legislation supports the development of new or expanded public school programs spanning the ages of 4-9, such as two-year kindergartens. Presently, 32 public schools in the state have established inclusive programs for 4-year-olds.

All in all, says Holmes, "we have tried to look at how all the people and programs can work together and to achieve as little duplication and as much coordination as possible."

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KENTUCKY

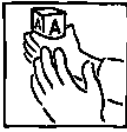
About the same time that specialists and others in Kentucky concerned with services for pre-school-age children with disabilities were finishing up their statewide plan, Kentucky's historic education reform plan also began to take shape. The two areas blended at the beginning of the 1990s to create an integrated program that moves children smoothly through the early childhood and early education systems.

In fact, according to Debbie Schumacher, director of the Division of Extended Learning for the Kentucky Department of Education, the pre-kindergarten programs are regarded as part of the regular school offerings and are in high demand among all families. State funding for pre-K classes is limited to children with disabilities and/or eligible for free lunches (47% of the four-year-old population). Even though funding was limited, the legislature wanted the pre-K services "to be top of the line," Schumacher says. Consequently, local districts "don't describe their pre-school programs as just for the disadvantaged or those with disabilities. They offer them as high-quality programs with high-quality services such as speech therapy."

Because Kentucky's services for children and education system started from a clean slate, the planners began by asking what they wanted for the children in the state, what an ideal delivery system for services would look like, what role the schools would play, and how could the whole system foster inclusion. One of the standards became a unified teacher certification system that combines early childhood education and special education. Professional development continues this emphasis



THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



Goal 1: Ready to Learn



Goal 2: School Completion



Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



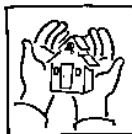
Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

on teachers having the skills to work with children with disabilities in regular classrooms.

Most children needing special services because of developmental delays are identified by early screening programs. Because of the popularity of the pre-school program with all parents, "we pick up a lot more children needing services when they enroll," according to Schumacher. As of 1998, Kentucky had enrolled 96% of children with disabilities in pre-school programs. Schumacher estimates that children with disabilities represent about 9% of the pre-school enrollment. The K-12 population of children with disabilities is 11-12% of the total enrollment, so most of those who do not receive services earlier tend to be children whose disabilities show up when they are learning to read, she says.

Another part of the Kentucky total system look is the collaboration between Head Start and the public pre-schools. About 45% of the school districts have blended Head Start and local programs. Because of the comparability between the state programs and Head Start, local districts work out the relationships that are best for them. Teachers might be shared, recruitments for the programs might be jointly run, the districts might contract out their pre-school program to collaborations that include Head Start, or funds between the Head Start and public school pre-schools might be exchanged. The programs work so closely together that they both use the same transportation system.

Five early childhood regional centers help with the coordination and with professional development, although local districts also train their own staff.

Although Kentucky could have established separate pre-school systems for children with disabilities, "we said we wanted one system, serving all, and that's what we have achieved," Schumacher says.

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What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

ARKANSAS

Inter-agency collaboration has been the model for Arkansas from the very beginning of the state's efforts to serve young children with disabilities. The state's plan offers every identified child three delivery options—in the home, in day care facilities, or in regular preschools. Inter-agency agreements also include Head Start as part of the total system.

Sixteen cooperatives throughout the state, as well as 14 school districts, organize the outreach in the community and the appropriate services for young children. A coordinator in each of the cooperatives runs the pre-school program and supervises itinerant teachers trained in special education who help develop Individualized Education Plans for children needing them and support regular pre-school teachers.

In addition, a grant program—Arkansas Better Chance (ABC)—allows funding for children with disabilities to be used to fulfill matching grants for programs covering children who are not eligible for Head Start. The funding comes from education, but is run through the Department of Human Services through an inter-agency agreement.

Many districts are opening regular pre-school, inclusive programs for three- and four-year-olds, according to Sandra Reifeiss, special education coordinator for the Arkansas Department of Education. They often are using Title I funding to support them. This is an especially important development for small towns and rural areas that were never able to support a pre-school before, public or private. All classrooms for these young children must be licensed through the early childhood office of the Department of Human Services.

The inter-agency collaboration not only has enabled the state to enroll 78% of children with disabilities in pre-school programs, but done so efficiently, Reifeiss says. "Our services go where the child is, the children are in the least restrictive environment, and certified teachers are able to serve more children."

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UPCOMING GOALS PANEL EVENTS

**December 6, 2000, 1PM EST
(National Teleconference)
Rising to the Test: Meeting
the Challenges of
Standards, Assessments,
and Accountability**

**Contact the NEGP at (202)724-0015
for more information.**

RESOURCES

Jane Burnette
ERIC/Disabilities and Gifted Education
Council for Exceptional Children
703/264-9419
<http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec.htm>

Eileen Ahearn
National Association of State Directors
of Special Education
1800 Diagonal Road, Room 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
703/519-3800
<http://www.nasdse.org>

National Information Center for Children and Youth
with Disabilities
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013-1492
800-695-0285
<http://www.aed.org/nichcy>

U.S Department of Education
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
330 C St. SW
Switzer Bldg., Rm. 3132
Washington, DC 20202-2524
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS>

Center for Special Education Finance
American Institutes for Research
P.O. Box 1113
1791 Arastradero Rd.
Palo Alto, CA 94302
415/493-3550
http://lists.air-dc.org/csef_hom/index.html

WEST VIRGINIA

While West Virginia is just now piloting state-sponsored programs for four-year-olds, it has identified and enrolled a high number of young children with disabilities in pre-school programs. The state's 80-percent level is due to aggressive identification procedures and a state policy that makes children who test out at only 25% developmentally delayed in two areas as eligible for services.

"We are a rural state with high levels of poverty and very few opportunities for literacy enrichment," explains Ginger Huffman. "That's why we have so many kids who qualify." Every county in West Virginia sponsors a program for children ages 3-5 with disabilities. The state encourages these programs to be community-based and also encourages those school districts with their own pre-kindergarten programs to make them inclusive. Huffman, who is coordinator of services for young children in the Office of Special Education, also works closely with health and human services, the child care community, and private schools to bring education services to young children with disabilities.

The Governor's Cabinet for Families and Children in West Virginia sponsors early learning opportunities including the Starting Point Centers. These are family resource centers. Many counties, according to Huffman, use the centers' resources to help families of children with disabilities make connections and obtain needed services.

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